

Abraham Lincoln papers

Abraham Lincoln, Memorandum on Probable Failure of Re-Election¹, August 23, 1864

¹ A summer of costly military stalemate and widespread disaffection among War Democrats and conservative Republicans with the administration's policies toward slavery persuaded Lincoln that he would probably be defeated in the 1864 presidential election. Perhaps to bear witness to his determination to save the Union even if defeated, he wrote out this memorandum, indicating his fear that General McClellan, if elected, would be forced by members of his party to seek an armistice with the Confederacy. Such an armistice could be tantamount to recognition of Confederate independence. Lincoln's memorandum, which he asked the members of his cabinet to sign as witnesses without reading, amounts to a pledge to work in concert with McClellan before the latter's inauguration.

Another copy of this document in John Hay's hand is in this collection.

Executive Mansion

Washington, Aug 23, 1864.

This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.

A. Lincoln

[Endorsed on Reverse:]

William H Seward

W. P. Fessenden

Edwin M Stanton

Gideon Welles

Edwd. Bates

M Blair

J. P. Usher

August 23. 1864.²

² The date is in Lincoln's hand.